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PLAIN  
DIRECTIONS

For Reading the  
Holy Scripture.

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Homil. upon Reading the Holy  
Scripture.

*There is nothing that more maintaineth Godliness of the Mind, and driveth away Ungodliness, than doth the continual Reading and Hearing of God's Word, if it be joined with a godly Mind, and a good Affection to know and follow God's Will. For without a single Eye, pure Intent, and good Mind, nothing is allowed for Good before God. And on the other side, nothing more darkeneth CHRIST and the Glory of God, nor bringeth in more Blindness, and all Kinds of Vices, than doth the Ignorance of God's Word.*

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Enlarged.

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## Homil. upon Reading the Holy Scripture.



*S* they that are Sick of any Ague, whatsoever they eat or drink, (though it be never so pleasant) yet it is as bitter to them as Worm-wood; not for the Bitterness of the Meat, but for the corrupt and bitter Humour that is in their Tongue and Mouth. Even so is the Sweetness of God's Word bitter, not of it self, but only unto them that have their Minds corrupted with long Custom of Sin, and Love of this World.

In reading of God's Word, he most profiteth that is most turned into it, that is, most inspired with the Holy Ghost, most in his Heart and Life altered and changed into that Thing which he readeth. He that is daily less and less proud, less wrathful, less covetous, and less desirous of worldly and vain Pleasures.

Although other Sciences be good, and to be learned, yet no Man can deny but this (the Knowledge of God's Word) is the chief, and passeth all other incomparably. What Excuse shall we therefore make at the last Day before Christ, that delight to read or hear Men's Phantasies and Inventions more than his most Holy Gospel, and will find no Time to do that, which chiefly (above all Things) we should do; and will rather

read other Things than that for the which we ought, rather to leave Reading of all other Things.

Ignorance of God's Word is the Cause of all Error, as Christ himself affirmed to the Sadducees. How should they then eschew Error, that will be still Ignorant? And how should they come out of Ignorance that will not read nor hear that Thing which should give them Knowledge?

Read it humbly, with a meek and lowly Heart, to the Intent you may glorify God, and not your self, with the Knowledge of it, and read it not without daily Praying to God, that he would direct your Reading to good Effect; and take upon you to expound it no further, than you can plainly understand it.

For (as St. Augustine says) the Knowledge of Holy Scripture is a great, large, and a high Palace, but the Door is very low, so that the high and arrogant Man cannot run in; but he must stoop low, and humble himself, that shall enter into it. Presumption and Arrogance is the Mother of all Error; and Humility needeth to fear no Error.

Chrysostome says, That Man's humane and worldly Wisdom or Science leadeth not to the Understanding of Scripture, but the Revelation of the Holy Ghost, who inspireth the true Meaning unto them, that with Humility and Diligence do search therefore.



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SINCE God of his Father-  
ly Goodness hath revealed  
himself, and the Way to  
eternal Life, in the Holy  
Scriptures; it is certainly  
the Duty of every Christian, to study  
the same with all Seriousness and Ap-  
plication. But then he ought to study  
them after such a Manner, as may en-  
able him thereby to obtain a *saving*  
*Knowledge of CHRIST*, that, as  
the Scripture it self expresses it, he

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may

may be thereby made *Wise unto Salvation* through Faith which is in Christ Jesus. (a)

§ 2. When therefore any Person resolves to read the Scripture of the *Old* or *New* Testament, with a sincere Desire to have his Soul wrought upon, reformed and improved by it, with a saving Knowledge of *JESUS CHRIST*; the following *Plain Directions* may, by the Blessing of God, prove serviceable for that End.

§ 3. That a serious *Reader* of the divine Scripture, may the better *prepare* himself for attaining that End, for which the Scripture is given; he ought in the first place to lay aside all manner of sinister *By-Ends*, apt to intrude into the best and most sacred Performances. He must watch all the Motions of his Heart, lest some irregular End should secretly move him, and beguiling him under some false Pretence or other, turn his Mind from that *Christian Simplicity*, which is so necessary for the profitable Reading

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(a) 2 Tim. 3. 15.

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ing of the Scripture. If this Caution be neglected, and the Reader influenced by *uncertain Designs* in so pious an Exercise, then he must needs fall short of that Benefit, which would undoubtedly accrue to his Soul, if he did perform so useful a Work with due Care and Application, like a faithful and attentive Disciple of our Saviour.

§ 4. It was one of those false and *selfish Ends*, that influenced the *Pharisees* of old, and hindered them from Reaping that saving Effect from the Study of Scripture, which, to a well-disposed Reader, is offer'd therein. They seemed indeed to search the Scripture with extraordinary Care and Nicety, but missing the principal *End*, for which the Scripture is given, they continued under the reigning Power of Sin; and all the laborious Searches they made in the Letter thereof, came to nothing. Nay, they even turned that into Poison, which, if well digested, would have proved wholesome Nourishment for the Good of their Souls. The Cause of this unprofitable Way of Reading the Scripture, is intimated by our Lord, when he

tells them, (b) *They thought to have eternal Life in the Scriptures: but they would not come to Christ, that they might have Life; that is, That they might be justified by his Merit, cleansed by his Blood, born again by his Spirit, sanctified by his Grace, and so saved in that Order and Method, which the Lord hath prescribed in his Word.*

§ 5. This *Incompliance* of the Scribes and Pharisees with the Terms of Salvation required by Jesus Christ, proved the very Cause of their eternal Ruin. They imagined they might inherit the Kingdom of God, barely by searching the Writings of *Moses*, and of the Prophets, without coming to Christ, or believing in his Name. They rejected his Person and Doctrine, for worldly Honour and Interest: And therefore the Lord told them plainly, that *they should perish and die in their Sins*; (c) This being the common Doom of all false Professors and Hypocrites, who, whilst they dwell and rest upon the *Letter and Outside* of the Scripture, despise that divine *Order and Method*,

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(b) Joh. 5. 39. (c) Joh. 8. 21, 24.



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ethod, wherein Life and Salvation is only to be obtained.

§ 6. Another *false Step* in the Study of the Scripture, is taken by those, who read the Bible with no other Intent, than to pick out something to *entertain their Fancy, and to pass away the Time, for Want of other Employment.* Human Reason is, after the Fall of Man, become so wanton and extravagant, as even to nourish Sin and Vanity, by what is designed to subdue it. The natural Man, notwithstanding all the Imbellishments Study and Art can give him, will now dwell upon the Surface of Histories recorded in Scripture. He will entertain and please his Fancy with a Multitude of Speculations, raised on all Manner of Subjects. He takes the Scripture for a large Field, in which he may expatiate at Pleasure, and let loose his Imagination upon any Text that comes in his Way: But whilst he neglects the Spiritual *Use* and *Application* thereof, properly tending to the Conversion of his Soul, the Word doth neither enlighten his Understanding, nor sanctify his Will and Affections.



§ 7. Another *false Step* in reading the Bible, is taken by those that look upon the Perusal of the Scripture, as a *meer outward Duty or Task, to the Performance whereof they think themselves obliged by the Law of God, without having due Regard to the gracious Invitation and Encouragement thereunto, given them in the Gospel.* If there was no Law, they would not mind the Study of the Scripture, nor perhaps any religious Exercise at all. As all the Works of such Men are *soured* by legal Views and Compulsions, so is their reading the Scripture much of the same Nature. They are not born of the Word of the Gospel, and so it is no Wonder they do not taste its Sweetness or Vertue. But such as are born again of the Word, as of a living Seed, do also desire to *grow thereby*, as by sincere, or pure, wholesome and nourishing Milk. To these the Word is sweeter than Honey and the Honey-comb, and more desirable than Gold and much fine Gold. They taste the Power of the Gospel, and are animated thereby, both to a serious Search after the divine Promises contained in Scripture, and likewise to the diligent and constant Practice of such Christian

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Virtues and Duties as depend thereon.

§ 8. Therefore those who read the Scripture upon no better Principle than that of a bare *Task, Custom, or Constraint*, cannot receive any solid or real Advantage from such a slight Performance. Their Devotion is commonly gone, as soon as the Chapter is ended. As it is barely *Custom* that moveth them; so a Flash of outward Profession, or a little spice of Morality, satisfieth them. They build the Whole of their Religion upon the hollow Foundation of this *dead Formality*, and then flatter themselves into a vain Conceit of *having done their Duty*. Some are herein so punctual and strict, as to perform this Task *Morning and Evening*, which they will never omit, unless some pregnant Cause do obstruct it. Some have received this *Customary* Way of Reading from their Ancestors and Parents, and not only keep it up in their own Families, but hand it down also to their Children and following Generations.

§ 9. This *Custom* is often attended with

with many fatal Effects. As it carrieth in it an outward *Appearance* of *Goodness*, so it is apt to make an unwary Reader value himself upon his Performance. The worst is, there is no *living Principle*, no hearty Desire, or spiritual Hunger, going along with the Custom of Reading. The Word is neither inwardly digested, nor any substantial Food afforded thereby to the Mind. No sooner is this specious Custom finished in the Morning, but another Scene of Life is opened in the succeeding Part of the Day. This is spent in all Manner of Vanity, trifling Conversation, Love of the World, temporal Concerns, and in a Word, in a *State of Carnal Security*, without so much as one Thought turned to what was read in the Morning. The whole Bent of Life is now visibly influenced by the Spirit of this World, and the Manners of such Readers widely differ from what they appeared to be in the Morning. In short: Their Life is a constant Contradiction to the whole Design of the divine Scripture. To read the Scripture, or hear it read Morning and Evening, is laudable in it self; but to

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rest there, and not improve what hath been read, is a Piece of dead Formality, and makes the Reader obnoxious to that terrible Sentence: *He shall be beaten with many Stripes.*

§ 10. Another *false Step* in Reading the Scripture is taken by those, who busie themselves and others with the various *Opinions* and *Notions*, both of the ancient and modern Divines upon the Scripture. Such Men as these will run through large Composures, and, with unwearied Pains, search out the Opinion of such a Divine, Father and Teacher, as perhaps made some Figure in that Age wherein he lived. They think they have discovered no small Treasure, when they can quote the Opinion of a great Man upon some difficult Place of Scripture, particularly if he seems to favour some Notion or other to which they are addicted. But as all those Efforts are full of Doubts and Uncertainties, so they leave the Reader just where he was before, that is, in a Sea of uncertain Opinions; it being impossible that the uncertain Notions of Men should beget a certain Faith in God,  
or



or influence the Mind with a divine Conviction and Assurance.

§ 11. This Way of Reading the Scripture, doth much prevail among such Men as love to be called *great Scholars, hard Students, and Criticks* in Divinity. It is generally attended with *Self-Love, Ambition, Ostentation*, and other Pharisaical Vices that lurk under the plausible Pretence of *Searching into the Scriptures*. It swells the Fancy with a World of *critical Niceties*, Disputes, and Contentions. Such a Man will search out all Manner of Intricacies in Reading the Scripture, rather than nourish his Heart with such plain and practical Doctrines as are apparent to every one's View. To him may be fitly applied that of St. Paul: (d) *They desire to be Teachers of the Law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.*

§ 12. Much of the same Temper are those that spend the Main of their Labour and Time, about those *difficult Places* of Scripture, which hitherto

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(d) 1 Tim. 1. 7.



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have proved too hard for the ablest Interpreters. Some gather up and compare the Opinions of others, whilst some bring in their own, and flatter themselves they have made such new Discoveries as were not known before. I dare say, 'tis almost a general Custom, that People will pry into great Curiosities, deep Mysteries, and hard Questions, rather than search into the inward State of their own Souls, in order to have this repaired, rectified, restored, and born again. The former of these Efforts is mainly a Work of the *Memory*, of the *Head* and *Fancy*; whereas the latter doth chiefly affect the *Heart*, and the interior Faculties of the Soul. But after all, such Readers ought well to consider the Saying of a pious Person: *Those that have a Reluctancy to obey the first Elements of the Instructions of God, cannot in Reason pretend he should satisfy them about the nicer Points of his Doctrine, and of the whole Religion by him established.* (e)

§ 13. Another Method altogether  
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(e) *Ludolf's Remains*, pag. 59.

*insufficient* to attain the End for which the Scripture is given, is the *too general Way of Reading*. Many can read whole Chapters, and delight too in one thing or other which offers itself to their View: But then they never come to a close and *particular Application* of the divine Truth they read. Or if at last they make some Application of the Word, they will make it *to others*, rather than to themselves. Thus they lose at once all the Benefit which else would accrue to their Souls from so sacred an Exercise. The same *posterous Way* some will follow in *Hearing of Sermons*. If a Vice be publicly reprov'd, they are so far from applying the Word to themselves, that they will cast about in their Thoughts to find an Object where to fix it. Such an irregular Hearer, or Reader, is like the *Pharisee*, who thought he did not need to make any Confession of Sin, but might justify himself, even before God, because he reckoned he was not as other Men were, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or Publicans. Whereas the best Christian will apply to himself the worst of Reproofs he hears

which hears or reads. He thinks within himself :

§ 14. ' Lord, I am guilty before thee of all those Vices ! The Seed of the blackest and most detestable Crimes is lurking within my Breast ! How many *Heart-Sins*, that never shew themselves abroad, do I harbour within me ! What a Brood of sinful Desires ! What a Multitude of worldly Thoughts and of corrupt Inclinations lodge within me ! For though Men cannot arraign me for those inward Pollutions, yet thou, O God, who art a Spirit, and searchest the inmost Springs of the Mind, findest me guilty of all those Crimes, and wilt call me to an Account in that Day, wherein the World shall be judged in Righteousness. What matter is it, how strict I am in the Eyes of the World, if thy Spirit reproveth me of Sin, and if thy Law lays open that Filthiness of the Spirit which fosters within, and infects my Will and Actions ?

§ 15. In this manner doth a sincere Christian apply every Word to *Himself*,

*self*, before he presumeth to apply it to others. He taketh first himself the healing Medicine of the Word, that he may afterwards the more effectually prescribe it to others. If he be intrusted with a Cure of Souls, either in a publick or more private Capacity, he doth then the more carefully follow this Method. Ministers and Schoolmaster, Father and Mother (who have all a Cure of Souls committed to them) ought first to apply the Word to themselves, before they administer it to those over whom they are set.

§ 16. Another *Mistake* committed in Reading the Scripture is, when Man turns the Scripture into a Book of *Moralities*, and thinks he does enough when, by his own Strength, he endeavours to live up to the same. Such a Reader is not like ever to gain a true Insight into the *Fall of Man*, and his *Recovery* by *JESUS CHRIST*. For as he hath but a slight Knowledge of the various Diseases of Man's Soul, it cannot be expected, he should bear any great Regard to *JESUS CHRIST*, the Restorer of Nature. He thinks

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ly thinks a little good *Education* and the *Conversation* will fashion him into a *very good Man*, and quite take off what may seem rude and unmannerly in him. He believeth that *Scripture-Morals* and *Seneca's Morals* are all upon a Level, and he will perhaps prefer the latter better than the former, since they are set off with greater Advantage, for pleasing a Man's natural Taste. A little and slight Reformation will go a great Way with him, who seeth but little that wants to be reformed. The Whole of his Religion is too much adapted to the Taste of the World. And as he squares his Actions by a Set of shining Moralities, and refrains from the visible Pollutions of the World; so he will be apt to raise his own Esteem on the Vileness of those that openly wallow in the Mire of Corruption.

§ 17. To remedy this disorderly Way of Reading, a Man ought well to consider, the principal *END* for which the Scripture is indited. The Scripture is written, not so much to *make us externally good and sober*, as to make us

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**BELIEVE**, that *Jesus is the Christ*, the Son of God, and that believing we might have Life through his Name. (f) O as St. Paul expresseth it, the Scripture is to make us wise unto Salvation through Faith, which is in Christ Jesus, that the Man of God may be perfectly furnished unto all good Works. (g) This **FAITH** in Christ is attended with many marvellous Changes upon the Mind. It is on Man's side the first and original Principle, from whence Abundance of heavenly Operations do proceed. It removeth the Soul out of the accursed Stock of Nature and transplants her into *Jesus Christ* as a Branch into the true Vine. By *Faith*, a Man is made a new Creature and this enduing him with a willing free and filial Spirit, his Works are thereby rendered acceptable to God since they proceed no longer from Nature, but from **GRACE**, the leading Principle of a Christian's Life and Actions. In a Word: The *Death and Resurrection* of Christ are the great Springs whence

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(f) John 20. 31. (g) 2 Tim. 3. 15, 17.

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hence all *Christian Morals* do constantly flow.

§ 18. Since therefore *JESUS CHRIST* is the *End* and *Scope* of the *Divine Scriptures*, all our *Reading* ought to be resolved into him, and into those *Effects* that proceed from a just *Application* of his *Death* and *Merits*. He is the *Lord our Righteousness*, by whose *Knowledge* we ought to be justified. (b) By the *Knowledge* of his *Cross*, we ought to *crucify our Flesh*, with the *Affections* and *Lusts*. (i) By the *Knowledge* of his *Death*, we ought to be *planted together in the Likeness thereof*. (k) By the *Knowledge* of his *Burial*, we ought to be *Buried with him* into *Death*. (l) By the *Knowledge* of his *Resurrection*, we ought to *rise with him* into a new *Life*, and to *seek those Things which are above*, (m) being begotten thereby into a lively *hope*. (n) Upon the whole: For the *Excellency* of the *Knowledge* of *CHRIST*, we ought to

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(b) Jer. 23. 6. Isa. 53. 11. (i) Gal. 5. 24.

(k) Rom. 6. 5. (l) Ver. 4.

(m) Col. 3. 1. (n) 1 Pet. 1. 3.

to count all Things Loss and Dun-  
 (o) and ought thereby to escape the  
 Pollutions of the World. (p) And we  
 can doubt, that the *Morals, Manner*  
*Works, and Actions*, derived from  
 sublime a Principle, are widely dif-  
 ferent from those that are done by  
 mere Heathen, or by a natural Motive.  
 For as this latter sort of *Morals*  
 descend from so vitiated an Original  
 as corrupt Nature; so every one  
 of them carrieth a Mark of Sin and  
 Infamy stamped upon it, and is in-  
 wise worthy of the Name of *Good*  
*Works*; nor ought these *Morals* to be  
 confounded with the Works of a true  
 and regenerate Christian.

§ 19. Another *insufficient* Way  
 reading the Scripture is, when a Man  
*acquiesceth in some Flashes or Fits of Devotion*,  
 which will at Times start up  
 in his Mind. The Scripture contains  
 many moving Accounts, whereby  
 Man may be wrought up to violent  
 Passions, either of Joy or Sorrow,  
 Fear or Hope, and the like. Thus

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(o) Phil. 3. 8. (p) 2 Pet. 2. 20.

Some, when they read the History of the *Sufferings of Christ*, will be filled with Anger and Horror against those who heinously murdered him. When they read an Account of the Joys of Heaven, and of the Happiness of the World to come, they will seem so wonderfully affected therewith, as if they even enjoyed a Fore-taste of that blessed State. In a Word: They will be under a Transport of several Passions succeeding one another, as the Thread of the History leads them.

§ 20. But after all, if Things be duly considered, this Way of Reading the Scripture seems to be too *light* and *uncertain*. Any *Romantick* Story dressed up in an affectionate Manner, and set off with such Embellishments as Art and Study can give it, will now and then leave the same Effect upon an unwary Reader, and deceive his Fancy into many violent Motions. Representations of that kind are apt to put a Man upon an eager Pursuit of Dreams and Fictions, and even fire his Passions with a delusive Influence. But whatever may be the Cause of these Passions, 'tis certain, they are at

at the best, but so many *heartly* Emotions, that soon spring up, and soon die away again. They blow the inferior Faculties into Hurry and Violence, but do neither enlighten the *Understanding* with substantial Knowledge, nor influence the *Will* with Heavenly Love and Affections. But, after all, we must not suppose that such a sacred Book as the Scripture is, should produce no better Effects than those. As it chiefly relateth to the *Heart* and the interior Faculties of the Mind, so the Operation that proceedeth from it, mainly affects the Heart, and the noblest Powers of the Soul. It is *strong* and *lasting*, and diffusing itself through the whole Man, doth gradually transform him into an Heavenly Temper of Mind.

§ 21. This Effect, I say, which the Word leaveth behind it, doth not work so much upon the *Fancy* and Humour of a Man, as upon the *Will*, and the nobler Faculties. And we ought to read the Scripture with that very In-

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viz. to have our *Understanding* enlightened, and our *Will sanctified* by it. Every pondered the Word in her Heart: (q) St. Peter bids us to take heed thereto, until the *Day-Star arise in our Hearts*. (r) The attending to this Word aright, doth beget us anew, enlighten and convert us. (s) It maketh bring forth Fruit with Patience. (t) David meditated in it, and whilst he lived, the Fire burned. (u) He observed it with his *whole Heart*: It was a Lamp unto his Feet, and a Light unto his Path; (x) it did not so much authorize him into some sudden Comotions, as soberly direct his Steps in the Path of Righteousness.

§ 22. Whoever therefore reads the Scripture with the Understanding only, and without any Regard to the Will and Affections, depriveth himself of the main Benefit, which otherwise he might reap from such a sacred Exercise. In a Word: The Scriptures must  
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(q) Luk. 2. 19. (r) 2 Pet. 1. 19.

(s) Jam. 1. 18. Ps. 19. 7, 8. (t) Luk. 8. 15.

(u) Ps. 39. 3. (x) Psal. 119. 34, 105.

be read both with the *Understanding*, and with the *Will* and *Affections*, if ever the Reader will obtain the *End* which they were indited. This *End*, hath been mentioned already, is to make a Man *wise unto Salvation*, through *Faith in Jesus Christ*. And since both *Will* and *Understanding* are corrupted by Folly, and know or perceive nothing of the Order of Man's Salvation, they want both to be *made wise* by the divine Scripture. As the *Word* therefore *lightens* the *Understanding*, and stores it with sound and Evangelical Doctrines, so it ought to form the *Will* into a ready *Compliance* with what the *Understanding* receiveth. And then undoubtedly all the other *Affections* in the *Mind*, will follow the *Directions* of the superior Faculties, and yield ready Obedience to the *Word*. This is the *Way* to have the *Word* inwardly digested, the inner Man begotten thereby, and the whole Concern of Religion settled on a good and lasting Foundation of Faith, Love, and Obedience, accompanied with a well-grounded and joyful Hope of Salvation, of eternal Life, and Happiness.

§ 23. If this *affectionate* and *favoury* *Method* of Reading the Scriptures be neglected, or but slightly regarded, is then no Wonder, if in the midst of so much scriptural Light and Knowledge, to which we pretend, we are still stupid and ignorant in the substantial part of Religion. The Reading of the Scriptures barely with the *Understanding*, and at the same Time continuing in an *unsanctified*, disobedient, and refractory *Will*, is one of the *Sources* of Impiety in this Age, and of those strong Delusions that every where abound. And undoubtedly they will spread farther and farther, and involve us daily in greater Errors, unless we prevent it, by proving obedient to the *Word* which we read. If the *Will* inflamed by sinful Lusts, will by time render a Man unfit for the Reception of the spiritual Light in the Gospel. For this Light shines only in a Soul that hath conquered (at least in some Degree) the violent passions arising from *Self-will* and *Self-Love*, and thereby gained Liberty to attend well to the kind Motions of the divine Spirit.

§ 24. Humane *Reason*, though never so much refined and adorned with all the Improvements, Art and Study can give it, will yet fall short of true Insight into *spiritual* Matters whilst it remains void of the Principles of Grace. For an unregenerate Man how ingenious, polite, and learned soever he be, will behold *spiritual* Things through a *painted* or false Glass, and hug his own Fancies and Images, instead of the divine Truth of the Gospel. The Reason is, that he is destitute of that *Capacity* and *Fitness*, which is necessary for the Knowledge of *supernatural* and *spiritual* Objects. Such a Man will, for want of better Light, commit various Mistakes in his Application to Souls: He will reconcile *Christ* with *Belial*, and the divine Word with the Lust of the Flesh.

§ 25. All these *sinister Ends*, and *false Steps*, that hitherto have been mentioned, must be wholly forsaken if ever, by the Reading of the Word we design to arrive to a sound and *profitable* Knowledge of heavenly things.

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*SIMPLICITY* of Heart, that is, sincere and unfeigned Desire to be made wise unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Christ Jesus, is the best Preparation the Reader can bring to this sacred Study. And if it be attended with an unshaken *Resolution*, to order his whole Life and Conduct according to the *Directions* the Word propoundeth, then he cannot fail of obtaining the End for which the Scripture is given. In short: This ought to be a Man's Design, and whole Concern, that by Reading the Word he may become truly good, pious, regenerate, and heaven-minded; or that he may have his whole Mind, *Understanding*, and *Will*, possessed with a true and unfeigned Love of Religion. This *Christian In-ter-pretation* being strongly imprinted upon the Reader, will inspire all his Thoughts and Actions, Words and Inclinations, with *Heavenly Mindedness*, and direct them to that great End for which the Oracles of God are committed to

§ 26. This *practical* Method of Reading the Scripture, will still prove more profitable, if the Heart be prepared



with a fervent and hearty *Petition* put up for a Blessing upon so sacred Study. Nay, the Reading it self ought to be accompanied with continual *Prayers*, Thanksgivings, and Exaltations, for divine Help and Illumination; this being the best way to dig out every Truth into substantial Knowledge, and to make us submit our Will to the revealed Will of God. [See some *Forms of Prayer* hereafter subjoyned; though the Spirit of God is not confined to one Way of Expression.]

§ 27. The Reading of the Scriptures must be attended with serious *Meditation*. For by Meditation a Man begins to *tast* the good Word of God, the Apostle expresseth it. (y) And such a truly pious Person delights and rejoices in the holy Scripture, so as to meditate thereon *Day and Night*, and more and more to relish the Sweetness of the divine Revelation. *Meditation* is a Mean to suck divine Vertue and Sweetness out of every Flower, where with the Field of the Gospel is strewn. Though it be hard for a Beginner to fix his Thoughts on Objects where

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For as they are but little acquainted;  
to wean them from those whereon  
they have dwelt so long; yet Time and  
Industry will render it easy, and en-  
able the divine Law to him, more than  
thousands of Gold and Silver. 'Those  
that dig a Well, (to use the Com-  
parison of one of the Fathers) find  
still better Water as they pierce deep-  
er into the Bowels of the Earth; and  
the Mouth of the Well being wide-  
ned by Labour and Application, will  
send forth the Water in greater Ab-  
undance. So it is with the Well of  
the Holy Scripture. He that  
searches into it by *Meditation* and  
*Prayer*, will in Time feel the Rivers  
of Grace stream down into his  
Heart.'

§ 28. The Holy Scripture is like a  
Tree, every where laden with Plenty of  
sweet and savoury Fruit: And every  
Verse of it may be compared to a  
Bough, or Branch of the same fruitful  
Nature. Here every Bough ought  
to be shaken by it self, to try whether  
any Fruit will drop down into the  
Bosom of a hungry Soul. If the Read-  
er doth not find in one Verse where-  
withal to sustain his spiritual Life, he

may then pass on to another, and make Trial of that also. If he do but earnestly hunger after some spiritual Relief, the good Spirit of God will freely supply him with such Food, that shall best suit his present Condition.

§ 29. And after some Time spent in this practical Exercise, the *Difficulties* that first troubled the Reader, will be happily removed, and the Mind prepared for sweeter Enjoyments. He will go on every Day with greater Success, and will in Time discover *One Verse* so rich a Variety of whole some Fruits, as will make him even sit down under its Shadow, and fill his Hands with such Fruits as are most agreeable to the inward State of his Soul. But if after all his Endeavours some of those Fruits be still out of his Reach; I mean, if some *Mysteries* contained in Scripture be beyond his present Capacity, he is then to content himself with such as come within his Reach, and leave the rest to another more seasonable Enquiry.

§ 30. God, who is faithful on his Side, will not be wanting to visit the Soul

*For Reading the Scripture.* 33

and with various *Probations* and *Trials*,  
do by Means of them give her many  
spiritual Insight into the most hid-  
den Sense of the Scripture. And there-  
fore the Reader ought not to give over  
his sacred Study, at the Sight of some  
Difficulties. For as perhaps in for-  
mer Times he was never used to a  
singular Way of Reading and Medita-  
tion; so at his first setting out in so  
crooked a Path, he cannot but ex-  
perience various Lets and Disappointments.  
But constant Exercise, accompanied  
with an humble Mind, and a Will  
contented with the present Measure  
of Light, will at last overcome all  
those Difficulties, and bring the  
Reader into a more pleasant and easy  
Manner.

§ 31. As these Books are not pen-  
etrated after an *ordinary* Manner, so they  
require a *more than ordinary* Applica-  
tion to understand them. Nor are  
those dark Clouds that seem to hang  
over the Scriptures, unsuitable to the  
Wisdom of the divine Majesty. They  
are proper to create in us *mean Thoughts*  
of our own Abilities, and to convince  
us of the Necessity of a *supernatural*  
Light



Light to direct us. They let us see how *short-sighted* we are in the mysterious Method of Man's Salvation, and how little we understand of what we read, except *some Man do guide us*; which the devout Eunuch perceiving by his own Experience, desired St. Philip to be his spiritual Guide, in *Acts* 8. And our Saviour hath sent forth his Ministers of his Gospel, to instruct his People in the true Meaning of his written Word.

§ 32. But after all, (to use the Words of a pious Writer) ' there are shining Passages enough in Scripture ' to light us the Way to Heaven, though some unobvious Stars of the bright Sphere cannot be discerned without the Help of a *Telescope*. ' Since God then hath been pleased to provide sufficiently for our Instruction, what Reason have we to repine, if we have in a Book, not designed for us alone, provided also for those that are fitted for higher Attainments, especially since (if we

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(2) Mr. Boyle of the Style of Scripture, pag. 22.



## For Reading the Scripture. 35

us (we not wanting to our selves,) *those*  
myself *messages that are so obscure as to teach*  
on, and *nothing else, may at least teach us*  
that *humility.*

which  
by § 33. To return: *Prayer and Medi-*  
*philip* ought to go Hand in Hand in  
8. *Reading the Scripture.* When your  
th *meditation goes on but heavily, then*  
ust *beavoured to quicken it by Prayer and*  
s *application.* And when your Prayer  
oveth faint and languid, then recur  
o *Meditation, and revolve in your*  
Word and some of those heavenly Instruc-  
e *ations the Chapter affords.* Whilst you  
pture *Musing, (r) on the Word, the Fire*  
ave *perhaps may kindle, and your Devo-*  
f *tion recover Life.* Or when an Oppor-  
er *nity offers, to confer with some Friend*  
scope *other upon a spiritual Subject,*  
ease *that puzzleth the Mind, it may prove*  
r *Mean to clear up your Doubts, and*  
e *in some measure revive those Graces*  
no *that seemed to lie cover'd with the*  
all *ashes of Coldness and Indisposedness.*

we § 34. Above all Things, be sincere and  
be im-

impartial in constant *Examination* your self after the Reading of Scripture. If you read never so much, and neglect the Duty of *Self-Examination*, you are like the Hearer described by St. James. (b) *He indeed beheld his Face in a Glass*, and received some weak Impressions of the Word, but going his Way, he *straitway forgot* what manner of Man he was, and made no farther Use of what he had heard. Of the same Nature were those Hearers mentioned in the Gospel, (c) who having heard the Word, *went forth*, and being choaked with Cares, and Riches, and Pleasures of this Life, brought no Fruit to Perfection. The Word did not sooner affect their Thoughts, but it was soon gone.

§ 35. Such a Reader doth not ponder the Word in his Heart with Mary; (d) nor look steadily into the perfect Law of Liberty, by a diligent Search or Meditation; and so he must needs lose the Benefit of his Reading. By *Self-Ex-*

(b) Jam. 1. 23.  
(d) Luk. 2. 19.

(c) Luk. 8. 14.

*For Reading the Scripture.* 37

Examination, the whole Nature, Inclinations, Manners, and Actions, must be impartially sifted. Not only the outward Actions are to be brought to a Trial, but also the *Principle* that produceth them. For as the Law is *spiritual*, (e) so it doth not only require a Conformity of the outward Man to the divine Will, but also of the very Heart and Spirit. Again: Ours the Word of God is *quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the Dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit*, (f) so a Man's Examining himself, must not be confined to the Manners and Actions, but reach to the very Springs whence the Manners proceed.

§ 36. A new Life being thus gradually raised by the Word, there is no doubt, but that will influence all the Actions of a Man, and make them conformable to the divine Will. And this then the Works favour of the Principle whence they flow. If a Man doth but faithfully practise what he knows,

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(e) Rom. 7. 14. (f) Heb. 4. 12.

knows, his Knowledge will certainly increase with his Practice, and his Patience will shine more and more unto the perfect Day. The more he cleanseth himself from all Filthiness both of the Flesh and of the Spirit, the more will the divine Light display it self in his Soul, and the more solid will his Understanding prove in the Knowledge of Truth: (g) As, on the contrary, a Man that indulgeth himself in a profane Life, thereby darkens his Mind, and instead of an *experimental* and *searching* Knowledge, gathers in nothing else but a dead and literal Science of the Christian Religion. Who ever therefore despaireth of Success in this heavenly Study, or taketh but a slight and cursory View of the divine Commandments, which are exceeding *broad and wonderful* (i), may blame himself only, if he do not meet with

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(g) August. Lib. II. Cap. 7. de Doctr. Christ.

*In tantum videmus, in quantum morimur huic seculo; in quantum autem huic vivimus, non videmus. So far as we die to this World, we see; but so far as we live to it, we are spiritually blind.*

(h) Ps. 34. 8.

(i) Ps. 119. 96, 18.

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tain any substantial Comfort in the  
usal of the inspired Writings.

§37. What hath been hitherto propo-  
ed for the *profitable Reading of the divine*  
*Scripture*, will more fully appear when  
in these *Plain Directions* here laid down are,  
is Un a few Instances, *applied* to the Bu-  
vledge in Hand.

ary, First then, the Reading of the  
a *Scripture* must be begun with a hearty  
Mind *Prayer* for obtaining that Aid or As-  
sistance, which is necessary for making  
n no saving Use and Improvement of the  
l *Scripture* revealed Word. The Reader may use  
Who this, or any other good Form suggest-  
ccessed to him.

n but *A Prayer before Reading the Scrip-  
ture.*

**M**OST Merciful God, what  
Thanks can we return for  
the gracious Manifestation of thy  
Will, concerning the great Work  
of Man's Salvation! Thou hast in  
thy Word declared the Means to  
rescue Mankind from the Domini-  
on of Sin and Satan; and how by  
Repentance, and Faith, we may  
here



‘ here recover thy Love and Favour and ke  
‘ and hereafter obtain eternal Li or Le  
‘ and Salvation.

‘ Be graciously pleased to assist me metin  
‘ with thy divine Spirit, when I am about  
‘ reading thy holy Word. Let him  
‘ enlighten my Understanding, sanctify  
‘ my Will, purifie my Affections, guide  
‘ me into all Truth, remember me Souls  
‘ of thy Precepts, shed abroad thy the  
‘ Love in my Heart, quicken me by tion,  
‘ his Presence, and animate me into a may  
‘ ready Performance of all such Duties whic  
‘ as thy Word requireth ! ‘ G

‘ Let him open my Eyes, that I the  
‘ may behold the wondrous Things rou  
‘ of thy Law ; and thy Command- Let  
‘ ments become more desirable to Go  
‘ me than Gold, and much fine Gold. an  
‘ O let him kindle in my Soul, the rifl  
‘ gentle Flame of a living Faith, O  
‘ and then nourish it up with the be  
‘ sincere Milk of the Gospel. I be ar  
‘ seech thee, O infinite Goodness, to di  
‘ prepare me for so happy a State, by S  
‘ thy Word, which thou hast given  
‘ me to make me wise unto Salva- d  
‘ tion, through Faith in J E S U S t  
‘ CHRIST. Let me rejoice in thy r  
‘ Law, learn the Way of thy Statutes, f  
‘ and

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and keep it to the End! Through  
our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

*Sometimes the following Prayer may  
be used.*

**L**ORD JESUS CHRIST, who art  
the great and only Teacher of  
Souls; give me thy Holy Spirit,  
the Spirit of Wisdom and Revela-  
tion, that with his own Finger he  
may write in my Heart thy Words,  
which are Spirit and Life.

‘ Grant that I may effectually feel  
the Power of thy Word, for a tho-  
rough and intire Renewal of my Soul.  
Let me be begotten again by thy  
Gospel, as by incorruptible Seed,  
and let the Life of Grace be nou-  
rished up thereby as by sincere Milk.  
Open mine Eyes, O Lord, that I may  
behold the Mysteries of thy Law,  
and may mark, learn, and inwardly  
digest them, for the Good of my  
Soul.

‘ Let me never be a forgetful Rea-  
der; but so read, and meditate on  
thy Word, that my Understanding  
may be rescued thereby from Er-  
ror, my Will from Disobedience,  
‘ my

' my Memory from sinful Impressions  
 ' my Thoughts from Vanity, and  
 ' Affections from inordinate Pleasures  
 ' and my whole Life from Conforming  
 ' ing to a profane World.

' Instruct me in that Wisdom  
 ' which is from above, being pure  
 ' and peaceable, gentle, and easy to be  
 ' be entreated, full of Mercy and  
 ' good Fruits, without Partiality and  
 ' Hypocrisy. Thus shall my Soul  
 ' which is like a lost and wandering  
 ' Sheep, be led back into the Way of  
 ' Truth, and kept by thy Power  
 ' through Faith unto Salvation  
 ' Amen.

§ 38. It hath been hinted above  
 that the Reading of Scripture is to  
 be accompanied with serious Medita-  
 tion upon what we have read: Like-  
 wise with continual Prayers, Thank-  
 givings, and Ejaculations, as the best  
 Way to convert every Truth into Edi-  
 fication. For Instance, take the first  
 Words of *Genesis*:

*In the Beginning God created the Hea-  
 ven and the Earth.*

*Meditation.*

*Meditation.*

**H**OW great must God be, who  
by his Word hath created  
Heaven and Earth!

Since Heaven and Earth is so  
great, so glorious and beautiful,  
how much greater and more glorious  
must GOD himself be, who  
made them? He is infinitely  
greater than all the Creatures he  
hath produced. The very Heavens  
declare his Glory, and the Firmament  
sheweth his handy-Work.

*This Meditation may be thus turned  
into Prayer.*

**O** Almighty God, the Creator of  
Heaven and Earth! I thank  
thee for having taught me from  
whence Heaven and Earth have  
their Beginning. Grant that when-  
ever I view the great Works  
of thy Hand, I may behold therein  
thy own Greatness and Majesty.  
Let me never adhere to the Crea-  
ture with any inordinate Love,  
but

' but to thee alone, who art the A  
 ' mighty Maker of Heaven and Earth  
 ' Whenever I lift up mine Eyes to th  
 ' Heaven, or cast them down toward  
 ' the Earth, then put me in Mind o  
 ' this thy Word, that I may duly ho  
 ' nour and worship thee, who art the  
 ' the Creator of both Heaven and Earth

*Or thus.*

' **D**E A R God! Since thou art  
 ' the Creator of Heaven and  
 ' Earth; thou must needs be better  
 ' and more glorious than Heaven  
 ' and Earth. Therefore let me never  
 ' rest in any Creature, but in thee  
 ' alone, who hast created them all.  
 ' Let me never desire any Thing in  
 ' Heaven or Earth besides Thee.

*Another Meditation upon the same Words.*

' **G**OD hath created Heaven and  
 ' Earth, and all Creatures con-  
 ' tained therein. He hath also crea-  
 ' ted *Me*, and fashioned all my Mem-  
 ' bers. How great an Honour is it  
 ' to



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to be the Workmanship of Almighty God! What he hath created, he hath also preserved Thousands of Years by the same Word that produced it. And as he preserveth the Whole, he doth also preserve every particular and individual Being.

*A Prayer.*

**A**lmighty God, thou art the true Father of whom the whole Family in Heaven and Earth is named; for thou alone hast made both Heaven and Earth Teach me that I ought to look upon this my Body of Clay, this Lump of Earth, as the Workmanship of thy Hand; that so I may never *abuse it* to any Sin, nor prostitute it to sensual Lust and Pleasure, but employ it entirely in thy Service, who hast made, and hitherto preserved it.

*Or thus:*

**D**EAR Heavenly Father, how is it possible for me to be troubled with anxious Cares and  
Thought

' Thoughts about the Maintenance  
 ' my Body, which thou hast created  
 ' Strengthen my Faith, O Lord, that  
 ' with a filial Trust I may rely on  
 ' thy Fatherly Goodness, and firmly  
 ' believe that thou wilt never leave  
 ' me nor forsake me.

§ 39. According to the preceding  
*Rules*, the Duty of *Self-Examination* is  
 constantly to accompany Prayer and  
 Meditation. Self-Examination pre-  
 pareth the Way for the Practice of  
 what we have read, which is the very  
 Crown and Topstone of all our Studies  
 in this Kind. Self-Examination layeth  
 the Word to the Heart, and the  
 Heart to the Word, and enquireth  
 what Conformity the Heart beareth  
 to the Word. The Word is the Mo-  
 del and Pattern into which the Heart  
 is to be wrought by daily Self-Exa-  
 mination, till the Image of God be  
 impressed thereon again. The A-  
 postle speaks of a *Form of Doctrine*,  
 (i) to which, or into which we are  
 delivered.

§ 40. The

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(i) Rom. 6. 17.

§ 40. The Doctrine of the Gospel is a pious Divine (k) expreffeth it) has a transforming Power, to change and fashion Mens Minds into the Likeness of it, as the Mould doth the Metal that is cast into it : The Doctrine of the Gospel is the Mould, and the Heart is the Metal, which when melted and cast into the Mould, receiveth its Form and Figure.' The best Method therefore to facilitate the Duty of *Self-Examination*, is to form *Questions* out of such Places of Scripture as have been read and considered, according to the *Directions* given above. Those Questions, when a Man puts them to himself, will make appear, how far the Heart is cast into the Mould of the Word, and how much there is wanting of this Divine Transformation of the Mind. But then he ought well to consider, that as the Word is a spiritual Word, the Examination which is to be made by it, must be of the same Nature, that is, spiritual and internal, not regarding

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(k) Mr. Burkitt in Rom. vi. 17.

ing so much the outward Act of Duty, as the inward Frame of the Mind, from which the external Performance proceeds. This will more fully appear, when, according to the Place quoted above, [*In the Beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth,*] one maketh the following

*Self-Examination.*

‘ DID I ever duly consider, from  
 ‘ whence Heaven and Earth  
 ‘ have their first and *Original Being*; or  
 ‘ have I passed over in a careless  
 ‘ Manner so great a Work of God’s  
 ‘ own Hands? Did I ever admire  
 ‘ the omnipotent Power of the Crea-  
 ‘ tor, who hath called *those Things*  
 ‘ *which are not, as though they were,*  
 ‘ (Rom. 4. 17.) and hath framed the  
 ‘ *Worlds by his Word*?  
 ‘ Have I perhaps admired the Hea-  
 ‘ vens more than my Father who is  
 ‘ in them? Have I loved the Crea-  
 ‘ ture more than God, who made it?  
 ‘ Hath the Viewing of the Heavens  
 ‘ raised my Mind to *Heavenly Thoughts*  
 and

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and Contemplations; and have I even now my *Conversation in Heaven*, where I for ever desire to be?

' The Heavens and the Earth had a Beginning, and will *pass away* again in God's own Time: Have I then duly considered, that my Heart is not to be fixed on Heaven, or Earth, or any perishing Creature, but on God alone, with whom there is no such Variableness?

' The Blessed Trinity hath created Heaven and Earth, and *my self* also, who am a small Particle of God's Creation: Have I therefore remembered my Creator from the Days of my Youth, and humbly worshipped him, from whom I have my very Life and Being?

' Have I ever yielded my Members, being Part of God's Creation, to the Service of Lust and Vanity; or have I constantly used them to the Glory of God, who hath made and preserved them?

' Did I ever, by viewing the *Natural* Creation, elevate my Mind to that *spiritual* Creation, whereby a new Heart is created, and a new Spirit is put within us?



‘ God hath made the Heavens, and  
 ‘ adorned them with Sun and Moon,  
 ‘ and other bright and glorious Bodies:  
 ‘ And have not I too often *abused* the  
 ‘ Light thereof, in sinning ungratefully  
 ‘ by the Benefit and Direction of their  
 ‘ Light, against their Creator, and  
 ‘ mine?

‘ Hath God created the Earth, and  
 ‘ all the Creatures contained therein?  
 ‘ Truly he created them for no other  
 ‘ End, than to promote his own Glo-  
 ‘ ry thereby: Have I always used the  
 ‘ Creatures to this End; or have I  
 ‘ by Pride and Luxury, by Lust and  
 ‘ Vanity, subjected them still to greater  
 ‘ Bondage, and thereby frustrated the  
 ‘ End designed by the Creator?

‘ Did I ever consider, that as by  
 ‘ the WORD of God, the Light was  
 ‘ brought forth out of Darkness; so  
 ‘ in the new Creation, a thorough  
 ‘ Sense of my own Corruption and  
 ‘ Darkness, must precede the State of  
 ‘ divine Illumination? &c.

§ 40. 'Tis certain that by such and  
 the like *Enquiries*, a Man may in Time  
 learn the Duty of *Self-Examination* \*,  
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\* See Short Heads of Self-Examination, for  
 the Assistance of those who practise that Duty.

## *For Reading the Scripture. 51*

the Practice whereof is so useful in every Respect, and so necessary in Reading the Scripture, that no great Progress in the spiritual Life can be made without it. The divine Writings being *exceeding broad*, and abounding in heavenly Sense, will afford copious Matter for so pious an Exercise. Now and then one Verse will open a large Field for *Meditation* and *Self-Examination*.

All must be concluded again with a hearty *Prayer* for a divine Blessing upon this Work.

### *A Prayer after the Reading of the Holy Scripture.*

‘ **O** Infinitely holy and gracious  
‘ God, I render thee hearty  
‘ Thanks for the Manifestation of thy  
‘ Word, and for the Means of Grace  
‘ therein described, proposed and offered to us. Thy Word discovers to  
‘ me the Evil of Sin, that hath overspread my Soul; and the Evil of  
‘ Punishment, which will certainly be  
‘ inflicted on the Transgressors. Sin  
‘ hath corrupted my Heart, darkened  
‘ my Understanding, infected my Will.  
‘ It hath polluted my Memory, de-

filed my Imagination, raised my Reason against the Obedience of Faith, and hath made me yield my Members Servants to Iniquity unto Iniquity. I have been miserably deceived by thinking my self Innocent, for refraining from grosser Acts of Impiety: Whereas thy Law diffusing its spiritual Light through my Soul, teacheth me, that all the Imaginations of my Heart are evil, and only evil continually.

Let this Word which I have now read, have a blessed Effect upon me! Let it shew unto me my Fall in *Adam*, and my Restoration in *CHRIST*. Strengthen my Faith, that I may rely on the Word of the Goipel, and be thereby born again into a lively Hope, and cleansed from all Filthiness of the Flesh and Spirit. Let me never rest in an external Performance of a few religious Duties; but grant that I may inwardly digest thy Word, and that the sanctifying Effect thereof may diffuse it self through Soul and Body, Will and Understanding, Thoughts and Desires, Life and Actions.

Enable

*For Reading the Scripture.* 53

‘ Enable me by thy Spirit faithfully to do thy Will, and to establish my whole Religion upon the safe Foundation of thy Word. Have Compassion also upon all those that sit as yet in Darkness, and in the Shadow of Death, and guide them by thy Word into the Way of Life and Peace! *Amen.*

*Adspirations.*

‘ **T**ouch, O Lord, my Heart with a Coal from thy Altar, when I read thy Word. Melt it by the Word of the Law into real Sorrow for my Sins, and then seal it with a Sense of the Remission of them declared in the Gospel.

2. ‘ O Lord, I am blind by Nature, and altogether unable to find that Pearl of great Price the Gospel proposeth. The Treasure of thy Kingdom is hid under the Mystery of the Cross, and revealed to those only whose Eye is made single by Faith and Obedience.

3. ‘ O Lord, heal the Eye of my Soul, and give me a spiritual Sight; that I may see the wondrous Things



' of thy Law: Heal my Ear, that I  
 ' may hear thy Word, and obey it:  
 ' Heal my Taſt, that thy Word may  
 ' be ſweeter to me than Honey, and the  
 ' Honey-comb: Heal my Reason, that  
 ' it may prove no longer refractory to  
 ' the Work of Faith: Heal my  
 ' Will, that I may keep thy Com-  
 ' mandments; and heal my Under-  
 ' ſtanding, that I may ſee the mar-  
 ' vellous Order of our Salvation, ex-  
 ' hibited in thy Word.

4. ' As Men do not put new Wine  
 ' into old Bottles, but into new, to  
 ' preſerve 'em both; ſo grant that I  
 ' may never preſume to receive the  
 ' Myſteries of thy Kingdom with a  
 ' corrupt and unregenerate Heart.

5. ' Alas! moſt Merciful Lord;  
 ' the natural Man, ſuch as he is after  
 ' the Fall, with all his Wit and Parts,  
 ' his Reason and Learning, and all  
 ' native and acquired Accompliſh-  
 ' ments, doth not receive and em-  
 ' brace, but reſiſt and reject the  
 ' Motions and Teachings of thy di-  
 ' vine Spirit. Let this Conſideration  
 ' humble me before thee, O Lord; and  
 ' grant that I may be enlightned  
 ' from above, renewed and born  
 ' again



‘ again by thy Spirit, to apprehend  
‘ spiritual Truths with a spiritual  
‘ Will and Understanding.

§ 41. One that hath never been used to the serious Study of the holy Scripture, which yet is the Duty of all Christians, will be too apt to think, that such a Method as is here before described is very inconvenient, especially for the *Unlearned*, who will find it both difficult and tedious. But it should be considered,

1. That the Difficulty will be lessened by degrees, more and more, as the pious Reader goeth on constantly with this holy and profitable Exercise. The more he is used to it, the better he will be able to perform it. Also he may take some good, pious, and judicious *Commentary*, or *Exposition*, to help him in the Understanding of such Texts as require that Help. Or he may desire Information from his spiritual Pastor, or some other judicious Friend; as hath been already hinted above, in § 31, and 33. The divine Grace and Benediction will not be wanting to render the foregoing Rules practicable at first, and familiar and easie at length.  
And

And no one who makes the Experiment will find his Time and Labour lost. But then he must persevere in the Study of the divine Oracles, as long as he lives. So an unlearned Person, of small or dull Capacity, and weak natural Parts, though beginning with slow Understanding and Barrenness of Thought, may, with divine Assistance, improve gradually in Meditation and Prayer, beyond Expectation, beyond all mere humane Probability or Power. Such a one may be contented to meditate and pray at first, with never so few Sentences or Words, till he or she can perform more and better by little and little, taking at first such Texts or Passages of the written Word to meditate and pray over, as are plainest and easiest to their Understanding, before they attempt any that are more difficult. And it is well known, that the most necessary and important Texts are the most plain and easie to be understood. Wherefore no Christian will be at a Loss, to find still such Matter of Meditation and Prayer, in reading the holy Scripture, as will be suitable to his or her present Capacity, Necessity and Use. And in the Choice of such practical

*For Reading the Scripture.* 57

practical and remakable Places of the holy Scripture, good Help is offered in a small Tract, (1) intituled, *Several Methods of Reading the holy Scriptures in private, seriously recommended to Consideration and Use.* Which it will be worth the Reader's while to peruse.

2. Though it may seem tedious, to read in such an exact and slow Method, as hath been proposed, so that one's whole Life time would suffice to read but a few of the sacred Books at that rate: Yet that Objection will fall to the Ground, when we resolve to use *Prudence* in this important and necessary Work. For although such particular Meditation and Application, with Prayer, cannot be allotted to all that is read, it may to such Passages or Sentences, as are most suitable and applicable to the Condition and Circumstances of each Reader; while the rest is only read attentively, in Order as it stands in the several Books. Which Method may well prevent all *Tediousness*, and be attended both with Expedition, and with Delight.

§ 42.

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(1) of Mr. Blackwell's.

§ 42. Also it will be very profitable for all Christians that have Families, carefully to keep up the reading of the holy Scripture, as well as all other good and religious Exercises, in their several Houses. Which should be done especially on the Lord's Day. And the Head of each Family will do well, with the Help of some good and sound Exposition, to explain and apply practically to them under his Care, what hath been read; giving Leave and Encouragement to Children and Servants, to ask Questions for their better Information, and to make some Observations according to their Ability. So they may improve considerably in Piety and Knowledge; wherein the Primitive Christians were very eminent; as Dr. *Cave* sheweth in his Treatise intitled *Primitive Christianity*, Part I. Ch. 9. with an Account of their Fidelity and Diligence in studying the holy Scripture themselves, and instructing such young Persons as were under their Care in the Principles of Religion. And pious Parents, Masters and Mistresses, will find it infinitely worth their while, to imitate those faithful and zealous Servants and Disciples of our great Master and Teacher, the Lord  
Jesus



Jesus Christ. For so they will obtain the Blessing of God upon themselves and their Families, and promote the temporal and eternal Happiness of both.

§ 43. Now it may not be improper, to conclude with a Paragraph or two, out of that celebrated System of Practical Divinity, *The Whole Duty of Man*, Ch. ii.

‘ Fourthly, we are to express our Reverence to God, by honouring his Word ; and this we must certainly do, if we do indeed honour him, there being no surer Sign of our despising any Person, than the setting light by what he says to us ; as on the contrary, if we value one, every Word he speaks will be of Weight with us. Now this Word of God is expressly contained in the holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, where he speaks to us, to shew us his Will and our Duty. And therefore to this Word of his, we are to bear a wonderful Respect, to look upon it as the Rule by which we must frame all the Actions of our Life ; and to that End, to study it much, to read it as often as we can ; if it may be, never to let a Day pass us without reading or hearing some Part of it read.

But



60 *Plain Directions, &c.*

‘ But then that is not all: We must not only read, but we must mark what we read; we must diligently observe, what Duties there are which God commands us to perform, what Faults they are, which God there charges us not to commit; together with the Rewards promised to the one, and the Punishment threatned to the other. When we have thus marked, we must lay them up in our Memory; not so loosely and carelessly, that they shall presently drop out again; but we must so fasten them there by often thinking and meditating on them, that we may have them ready for our Use. Now that Use is the directing of our Lives; and therefore whenever we are tempted to the committing of any Evil, we are then to call to Mind, this is the Thing which in such a Scripture is forbidden by God, and all his Vengeances threatned against it. And so in like manner, when any Opportunity is offered us of doing Good, to remember, this is the Duty which I was exhorted to in such a Scripture, and such glorious Rewards promised to the doing of it; and by these Considerations strengthen our selves, for resistance of the Evil, and Performance of the Good.

*F I N I S.*